

BVSDwatch Questionnaire for School Board Candidates

Please answer all of the following questions regarding important issues currently facing the BVSD School Board:

1. What changes would you advocate to
 - a) make the Board of Education a more responsive and accountable body, and
 - b) to improve community participation in school board meetings?
 - I want to help develop a sustainable community engagement process that will include diverse stakeholders so the board learns the views of the district's constituency in order to make sound policy. I have been a member of the board's Community Engagement Committee for the past year to help develop this process. In the upcoming year, I also want to engage each one of our school communities in the difficult discussions of what cuts can be made at their school that will allow us to preserve the core values of each school community.
2. Tell us your views on the pros and cons of small, neighborhood schools vs. larger schools with more grade levels.
 - BVSD has a variety of neighborhood schools in terms of size, as well as educational models: elementary, middle and high school and K-8. Many of the elementary schools in the city of Boulder and the mountain towns are small because they are some of the district's oldest school buildings. While schools in the eastern part of BVSD tend to be newer and larger and some are K-8. Parents have a choice of where to send their children. Some may choose their neighborhood schools no matter their size. While others may choose to send their children to other neighborhood schools, focus programs or charter schools. I view the district as having a portfolio of schools from which parents can choose. School choice is a state law.
3. What measures do you favor the board using to hold the Superintendent and his or her staff accountable?
 - The board has developed **measurable** five-year goals in the areas of student achievement, equity (closing the achievement gap) and climate. The Superintendent is responsible for directing his staff to attain these goals, and he is evaluated each year by the board against these goals. Additionally, the board has oversight of the finances of the district. The superintendent develops the annual budget based on the way he believes money is best spent to achieve the goals. The board ultimately approves the budget and therefore has oversight of the superintendent in terms of finances.
4. Tell us your opinion on the state of teachers' salaries. Do you think raising teachers' salaries should be a priority for BVSD?
 - BVSD is one of the highest achieving districts in the state because we can attract and retain quality teachers, and to continue to attract the brightest and most talented teachers the district needs to compensate teachers commensurate with their valuable contribution to our community. However, with state cuts from BVSD's budget it's been difficult to

Lesley Smith Response to BVSDWatch Questions

balance the budget this year while maintaining class sizes. I believe the board was fiscally responsible in developing the budget in June. It turns out the number of students attending district schools is higher than expected, resulting in a small up-tick in revenue, and the board has been able to offer the teachers a 1% Cost of Living Adjustment in the latest round of negotiations (this is on top of full health insurance benefits for the teachers, retirement benefits and raises through the salary schedule). I am all in favor of allowing a non-partisan person to come in and look closely at the “facts” that the BVEA and BVSD have presented so far in the negotiations and help us find middle ground. As soon as this current impasse is resolved, I want to start looking at productive ways in which we can achieve a professional pay schedule, which may include an alternative compensation process for teachers.

5. It is the considered opinion of many, including BVSDWatch, that the Information/Technology department suffers from poor management, bloated budgets, and a complete lack of oversight. How would you address this problem?
 - The district has implemented an IT Committee that meets twice a month to help the district with IT initiatives. In addition, Dave Williamson, the former director of the IT Department, has departed from the district. A national search will be made to hire a well qualified person to direct the IT Department. Boulder Valley has one of the nation’s highest concentrations of high tech firms. I would like to see BVSD be a leader in the use of technology for educational purposes.

The following questions are optional, and listed by category. They reflect other issues facing our school district, and the board. Feel free to answer any or all of them, especially if they touch on issues that are of particular importance to you in your campaign:

General:

1. What do you think are the most important issues facing the BVSD board at this time?
 - First and foremost the financial stability of the district. For the first time in recent history the district may receive less funding per student from the state next year. We need to maintain our excellent education in face of cuts.
 - Second, the relationship between the board and teachers and how to continue attracting and retaining high quality educators. Teacher morale is at a low point, and the board and superintendent must work to improve relations with the Boulder Valley Education Association so that we can continue to attract and retain our excellent teachers.
 - Finally, reducing the achievement gap while still maintaining a quality education for our high achieving students. Colorado has the largest achievement gap in the U.S. and BVSD has the highest achievement gap in the state. By corollary, BVSD has the largest achievement gap in the state. The board must continue to push the district to raise the educational outcomes of minority, English Language Learner and Special Education students.

Lesley Smith Response to BVSDWatch Questions

2. How would you rate the response of the current board to any or all of the following sensitive issues? What would you do or have done differently, and why?

I would like to point out that many of these issues have not been faced by the majority of the current board members.

- a. Teacher salaries – see my answer above regarding teacher salaries.
- b. Zero-tolerance discipline – The district must have consistent guidelines in how they treat discipline issues. As long as the district is consistent, I believe that the district will treat disciplinary issues equitably for all students (i.e., no favoritism).
- c. Religious bullying – The district should not tolerate bullying of any type, this includes religious bullying.
- d. Closure of small, neighborhood schools – In 2003 the district closed a number of small, neighborhood schools (this was before my tenure on the board). I do not think the district will close any more schools.
- e. New zoning district to keep schools from being sold for non-educational purposes – This is a city council decision, and I believe the council will vote in favor of this zoning. Many other communities already have this type of zoning for schools.
- f. The sale of Washington Elementary School – I am in favor of using the funds derived from the sale of Washington Elementary School to build a new school building for Columbine Elementary, a nearby neighborhood school. East County has had several new schools built, and I think the city of Boulder deserves some new school buildings. Plus, the new building will be much more energy efficient than the current one, and this will help reduce the carbon footprint of the school district.

3. What do you see as your greatest strengths, and what positive additions can you bring to this board? I have been told that one of my best assets is my ability to listen and to work collaboratively with people. Being a scientist, I try to take a pragmatic approach to problem solving. I take into account as many facts and opinions as I can gather and try to make a balanced decision. Finally, I have experience of being a board member. It takes a couple of years to really get up and running on the board, and I believe we need as many experienced people on the board to navigate our district through the tough financial times we face in the next couple of years.

4. Have you done volunteer work in BVSD schools? Please describe that work.
- 2005 – 2009 member and vice president (2007), Boulder Valley School Board of Education
 - 2004 – 2005 member, BVSD Stratification Task Force
 - 2004 – 2005 president, Community Montessori SIT/PTA
 - 2003 – 2004 vice president, Community Montessori SIT/PTA
 - 2002-2003 lower elementary representative, Community Montessori SIT/PTA
 - Watershed program, including field trips, for Community Montessori, Flatirons Elementary and Uni Hill (last one provided in Spanish)
 - Developed the Sombrero Marsh Education Program for 4th grade

Lesley Smith Response to BVSDWatch Questions

Student Achievement:

5. Please describe how you would recommend affecting positive changes in student achievement, and in closing the achievement gap.
 - I would like to glean from schools that are successful in teaching ELL students what they are doing well and spread their best practices to schools that may be struggling.

6. What is the most appropriate way to meet the needs of the increasing number of English language learners in our schools? First, I think the state should mandate that all teachers coming out of teaching programs have an ELL endorsement or considerable training in appropriate pedagogy for ELL students. The district will have more and more ELL students, and I would like to see all new teachers well prepared to teach these students. For veteran teachers, I would like to see more professional development in this area. Finally, I think the district needs to partner with ELL parents to help them learn English and navigate the educational system. Programs like the Family Resource Center and Intercambio are instrumental in allowing parents of ELL students to attain these important skills.
 - I would like to see all teachers receive professional development in ELL teaching techniques. At one point, every teacher will have ELL students in their classroom.

Superintendent:

7. What do you think are the primary responsibilities of school board members, and how do they differ from those of the Superintendent?
 - As an elected representative, my role as a school board member is to engage with the community at-large and set policy that reflects the community's values. A school board member is also accountable for the fiscal viability and stability of the district. The board must balance sound fiscal judgment with the values of our constituents. In addition, a board member must be the district's advocate by working with our elected officials to improve the level of funding for public education and our teachers. Finally, the board hires and oversees the superintendent. The board sets the goals for the superintendent and must hold him or her accountable for achieving the goals.

Responsiveness to the Community:

8. How would you approach your relationship with BVSDwatch? Describe what you see as the role of BVSDwatch with respect to the board and the district?
 - I would consider BVSDwatch a constituent group, and I would want to make sure they are involved in the Community Engagement process the board is developing.

Lesley Smith Response to BVSDWatch Questions

Teachers:

9. What policies and programs would you advocate to assure teachers a wide enough range of gainful employment, post secondary education and training or both? Teachers are required to take a certain number of hours to retain their teaching certification. With CU in our midst, I would like to see a stronger partnership with the university in terms of teacher professional development and post secondary education. Online learning is another great option for teachers. BVSD could encourage teachers to take online courses.
10. How do you think the board should proceed if faced with a strong vote of “No Confidence” in the Superintendent by the BVEA?
 - BVSD has roughly 200,000 voters, and I assume the majority of these people pay taxes to the state, and thus are the “owners” of the school district. The teachers are one constituent group, a key constituent group within the district. If the superintendent was faced with a No Confidence vote, I would want to gather data from our other constituents and constituent groups before making any decisions as to how to handle the vote. The board gathered input from various stakeholder groups when it was in the process of hiring our current superintendent. I would urge the board to do the same thing in this case.

Bond Accountability:

11. Would you recommend substantial changes in the School Facilities Master Plan? If so, what would those changes be?
 - No, I would not recommend any changes unless school programs have changed substantially. I believe the district used a sound instrument by which to judge school facilities and program compatability.
12. How would you deal with bond overruns, especially when it comes to cutting a school’s budget and/or transferring funds to another school, as well as how to manage any bond proceeds surpluses?
 - Bond money can only be used for capital construction, therefore bond surpluses cannot be used to balance a school’s budget. The district has been fortunate in that bond projects have been coming in under budget. In this case, there are surplus funds that must be meted out equitably. I am a proponent of going back to the Facilities Master Plan and funding projects that were cut from the bond (\$450M of funds were identified as needed but the bond is \$298M). I would propose to focus on safety issues first.

BVSD I/T Department:

13. Would you advocate revising or reversing the recent decision of BVSD to purchase single-platform computers from a single vendor for all schools and departments? Why or why not?
 - I do not have an issue with the district switching to a single platform. Because a PC-based platform is less expensive than a Mac-platform, the IT Committee has suggested that the district take a time-out from purchasing replacement computers because all

Lesley Smith Response to BVSDWatch Questions

schools now have new computers. The district is now purchasing each classroom a LCD projector. I am all in favor of this because classrooms now will have the full technology required for teaching.

CSAPS:

14. A vocal group of citizens has come out strongly opposed to CSAPS. Do you believe that problems with CSAP are only perceptual, or are there substantive changes with the tests and their implementation that you would support?
- I am not a strong proponent of CSAP's because in many cases teachers spend too much time teaching to the test (this is especially true in our more diverse schools), which takes away from a teacher's craftsmanship, and this type of pedagogy does not invoke higher order thinking skills. The district, however, needs to be accountable for its academic programs, and the CSAP scores can be used as a diagnostic tool (I myself use them for this purpose to see how I can help my children achieve at a higher level). I would like to see critical thinking skills fostered more strongly and uniformly across the district and less of an emphasis on CSAP preparation.

Finally, please tell us anything of importance about yourself or your platform, not covered in the above questions, that distinguishes you from your opponent(s), and recommends you for the role of BVSD school board member.

Please visit my website: www.LesleySmith.org to learn more about me.